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ROMNEY ADMINISTRATION UNVEILS HIGH-TECH ENHANCEMENTS TO MASSACHUSETTS HOMELAND SECURITY AND FIRE SAFETY

Six Field Communications Vehicles to Improve Coordination at Major Emergencies

Public Safety Secretary Edward A. Flynn today announced the deployment of six regional fire safety field communication vehicles as part of the Massachusetts Regional Homeland Security Strategy.

"The 9/11 Commission identified interoperability—the ability for commanders to communicate with each other at the scene of a major emergency—as one of the top issues for public safety managers," said Flynn. "These six field communications units will be used to address interoperability issues among all public safety personnel at major incidents."

The six field communication vehicles are valued at $267,000 each and were purchased with $1.6 million of federal fiscal year 2003 Homeland Security grant funds awarded by the Executive Office of Public Safety to the Fire Chiefs Association of Massachusetts (FCAM). The vehicles will be strategically placed statewide for an immediate response to major fire incidents. They will be located at the Pittsfield, Holyoke, Worcester, Taunton, Lowell and Waltham Fire Departments from where they can be rapidly dispatched for the creation of communications links with all public safety agencies at the scene.

State Fire Marshal Steven Coan said, "These field communication units help to create a statewide safety net that not only serves the public but also protects the public servants."

Part of Massachusetts' regional approach to homeland security, these six vehicles will be dispatched to the scene of a major emergency based on a fire department's request to one of the state's fifteen fire mobilization districts. Each district will have two technicians, with back up from ten technicians from the DFS Special Operations Unit who will be on scene within an hour to initiate full use of all technology in the truck. The units will enhance operational

communications and incident management by linking up with other vehicles from agencies such as DFS, the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, and the Massachusetts State Police.

Federal Homeland Security grants will pay for the additional training associated with the use of these vehicles, estimated at $169,000. The Fire Chiefs Association of Massachusetts (FCAM) and DFS are also providing web-based orientation and ongoing training for all fire departments on how and when to use the vehicles.

Chief David LaFond, FCAM President, said, “These high end technology loaded vehicles, along with trained personnel, are laying the groundwork to interface with federal initiatives such as the national incident management system.”

At the announcement in Wilmington today, Marshal Coan also unveiled DFS’s new Incident Rehab Unit (IRU) also purchased with Homeland Security grant funds. The medical monitoring in the Incident Rehab Unit will help to catch minor injuries before they become major, such as early heart attacks, and to reduce excessive physical and emotional stress on firefighters.

Heart attacks are the number one killer of firefighters. Making sure a firefighter’s blood pressure returns to base level before putting him back on the fire ground is an example of how the IRU can prevent serious injuries.

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(See attachment for specifications on the Field Communications Vehicles and the IRU)

Features of the Field Communication Vehicles

These vehicles will be equipped with:

- a JPS interoperability radio switch which allows for creation of radio talk groups on the scene of a major incident, taking dissimilar radio frequencies and uniting them onto a similar frequency to allow direct communications between multiple agencies;
- a microwave downlink system that will take video images from the State Police Air Wing and display them on a video screen within the truck;
- an on board weather station and a state of the art GPS system to provide directions and mapping to the vehicle driver;
- an on board computer connected via a wireless area network to an emergency responder grade laptop, allowing the laptop to be used several hundred feet from the truck at a command post and communicate back to the truck;
- a 30 ft, hydraulically operated lighting tower to provide on scene lighting, an on board generator to allow the vehicle to operate at a remote site;
- an on board printer and video recording and display system
- a bank of 10 to 12 mobile radios, across five frequency bands;
- six forward operating consoles, which integrate the truck's lap top into a rugged portable console with a power supply and fixed docking port. Included is a LCD display screen with interactive capabilities allowing notations and graphic markings made on a map or checklist to be recorded and transmitted back to the truck. Included is software allowing for real time transmission of data and images from the truck back to the truck and then, via the web, to an approved command center for viewing also.

Features of the Incident Rehab Unit

It provides:

- rehab for all emergency response personnel at an incident;
- environmentally controlled atmosphere
  (warm when its cold and cool when its hot);
- critical re-hydration with drinks and snacks;
- medical monitoring by local EMS – Blood pressure, O2 saturation, pulse. These vitals signs must return to base level in order for personnel to return to work at the incident.
- ability to be set up outside – portable tents in case truck cannot get close enough or for folks who do not want to go inside;
- space where investigators can interview first arriving personnel confidentially;
- platform for people coming out of an incident to be debriefed and for briefing people going into a long-term, incident.